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(Staff Photo by David D. Ryan)

MRS. ROBERT A. MONROE LEFT BROADWAY FOR HAPPY HOME
Laurie (left) and Maria Help Mrs. Monroe Work on Scrapbook

Woman Steps off Broadway Into Role of Richmond Wife

By PAULA LAURITZEN

It takes more than the reading of movie magazines to become familiar with the nation's top personalities, according to a local housewife.

Such names as Frank Sinatra, Perry Como, Joan Blondell, Julie Harris roll off the tongue of Mrs. Robert A. Monroe as easily as a vocal exercise. These are personal friends Mrs. Monroe, the former Mary Ashworth, made when acting on the Broadway stage and starring on radio.

"It's not enough to be able to dance or to sing," she said. "Today you have to dance, sing and act, as well as look your very best," said the lovely redhead.

With "a lot of hard work" Mrs. Monroe made the grade in New York and left the bright lights for a husband and family. After successful years acting on Broadway with Joan Blondell, co-starring with Perry Como, Julie Harris and Frank Sinatra she's a happy housewife, never bored with the duties of the home.

When her husband, vice president of Mutual Broadcasting Co., decided to give up the three-hour-a-day commuters' race from the not-so-easy suburbs to New York the couple selected Richmond as the ideal city. A year later Mrs. Monroe is convinced their choice was right.

She finds Richmond very similar to her native Boston. After her early years in Boston she studied at the American Academy in New York and Juilliard Conservatory. She played stock in Boston, Cambridge and Dennis on Cape Cod.

She walked out of drama school and onto the Broadway stage. A Broadway scout liked her graduation dramatic exercises and she won a part with Joan Blondell in "Naked Genius."

"There's nothing quite like opening night," she said, "But in show business you are constantly changing your performance to gear it to your audience. In radio you don't have to do this and I just love radio."

"I went to work for Perry Como on the Chesterfield Supper Club. That was a 15-minute-night show. It sounds easy but it was the hardest year and a half I ever had.

"We rehearsed at 10 a.m. and worked until noon. Then we broke for lunch. In the afternoon I had to take a lesson of some sort of the other. By 6 p.m. we had to be dressed and ready for the studio warm up show. Then we would do the show. We broke for dinner about 8 p.m. and would go back to do the show again for another audience and then for the west coast. This was before the day of taping radio broadcasting.

"All this was during the war. On week-ends Perry, his wife and the whole show would leave to go to various service bases and do shows for the soldiers.

"Perry was wonderful to work for. He's just like he is on stage. There was never any temperament on that show. He's a wonderful person.

"Soap operas were also a favorite of mine. I had parts on 'Portia Face Life, My True Story, Helen Trent, Ma Perkins, and Young Dr. Malone'."

In her home decorated with European furniture Mrs. Monroe enjoys painting and cooking. Portraits of her two daughters hang in the living room. Some of her furniture is that of her mother's, a baroness.

In Richmond Mrs. Monroe hopes to continue some of her career and will play the role of Goods and Riches in the St. Stephen's Episcopal Church production of "Everyman," which takes place tomorrow at 8:30 p.m.